



# COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

## Schools, some businesses close

# First snowfall of new year totals seven inches

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Snow Wednesday night and earlier today was a welcome sight for just about everyone in northwest Kansas with accumulations in Colby among the highest with 7 inches reported by 11 a.m. today, said Randy Coleman, meteorologist at the National Weather Service Office in Goodland.

School cancellations started rolling in early Wednesday night in eastern portions of the state, but by 6 a.m., most superintendents had called off classes in northwest Kansas as well.

But students weren't the only ones happy with this first major snowfall of the season. Producers around the area were in dire need of some moisture, said Dennis Chandler, Thomas County Extension Agent.

"This snow means a lot of good moisture for the wheat crop," he said. "It will also be nice ground cover and if we can get a good cold snap now, the wheat will be somewhat insulated from freeze damage."

Chandler said the only thing better would have been a wetter snow, but added that by far this is better than nothing at all.

"Another concern with the lighter snow is hopefully that we won't get too strong of winds to move the snow

away," he said. "What we want now is some sunshine, which will allow the snow to crust on to the wheat."

Coleman agreed that the moisture content in this snowfall was light, adding that for most areas in northwest Kansas the water equivalent ratio was averaging 30 to 1. "It was a dry snow and in Colby the 7 inches translated to about .35 inches of precipitation," he said. Other places getting the same amount of snowfall as Colby included Sharon Springs, Tribune, Atwood and about 19 miles southwest of Goodland.

Steve Rubin, another meteorologist, said reports also came in noting that Mingo and Brewster had 6 inches of snow and Rexford, Hoxie and McDonald had about 5 inches.

The City of Colby public works department was up early this morning and by 3:30 a.m. was clearing the main arteries of town. Snowplows continued efforts to remove snow throughout the day, said Gerry Bieker, public works director. Law enforcement officials in both the city and county reported good news with no snow-related accidents occurring Wednesday night or this morning. The forecast for the Colby area calls for clearing skies, chilly nighttime temperatures and warmer daytime readings. Details can be found in the Briefly column.



It was time for work and play with the first snow of the year. LEFT: Snowblowers and shovels were put to good use as businesses got ready to



CRYSTAL RUCKER/Colby Free Press

open this morning. RIGHT: School children took advantage of a snow day to have a little winter fun.

# Mother Nature leaves nobody out in first major storm

TOPEKA (AP)—From east to west, nobody escaped the winter hand dished out by Mother Nature on Wednesday and lasting into Thursday morning. Sleet, snow and thick coatings of ice created a weather nightmare, shutting down schools and state offices and causing power outages that sent many people to emergency shelters.

Hundreds of school districts canceled classes, as did Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, Wichita State University and Fort Hays State University.

And Gov. Bill Graves ordered state offices closed, with only essential personnel asked to report. Snow depths in northwest Kansas exceeded half a foot in the Colby area, where 6.2 inches fell by mid-morning and final accumulation was at 7 inches around noon.

Falling tree limbs and downed power lines left many communities without power. In many areas, tree limbs and branches littered neigh-

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Ben Gardner, trooper  
Kansas Highway Patrol

borhood streets, making some impassable. With rain that continued to fall Wednesday evening adding to the thick ice buildup already on the trees, the sounds of cracking branches were common in many neighborhoods.

In southeast Kansas, Pittsburg was left completely without electricity for about an hour late Wednesday afternoon, and even after the main problem was fixed, much of the city still lacked power.

Mt. Carmel Regional Medical Center in Pittsburg went to a backup generator Wednesday morning after losing power. At least two Pittsburg nursing homes had no heat Wednesday and moved patients to a facility with a backup generator.

"It's the biggest sleepover I've ever had," said Shyrell Smith, director of nursing at Medicalodge South, which took in about 90 people from the two nursing homes as well as

some other local residents.

As utility officials warned of prolonged outages, emergency shelters were set up in more than a half a dozen communities in southeast Kansas — including Pittsburg, Frontenac, Girard and Arcadia, along with others in Crawford and Cowley counties. In suburban Kansas City, Merriam also opened an emergency center for people to stay.

At least 9,000 Westar customers were in the dark Wednesday in Olathe, De Soto and Bonner Springs. And as many as 10,000 Board of Public Utilities customers lost power in Kansas City, Kan. School administrator Elaine Paepke, without power at her Overland Park home, learned via a battery-powered television that classes were canceled again for today.

The weather also contributed to traffic accidents, including at least three involving Kansas Department of Transportation snow removal trucks, said Clay Adams, a district en-

gineer for the agency.

In Topeka, drivers involved in minor fender-benders were asked to exchange information and report to the Law Enforcement Center when roads cleared. The state's highways were passable as long as motorists drive sensibly, said Benny Tarverdi, metro engineer for the Kansas Department of Transportation.

"Overall, I feel the drivers are doing a pretty good job," said Kansas Highway Patrol Trooper Ben Gardner of McPherson.

"Usually, the first time we get snow, they feel like they can just keep on zipping along at the same speed."

Elsewhere in the state, a sledding accident sent a 9-year-old Hutchinson girl to a Wichita hospital with critical head injuries.

Brianne Julian was sledding with her father Wednesday when she hit a metal fence post at a high rate of speed, said Lt. John Tracy, Hutchinson police detective commander.

## Sacred Heart School observes special week

By MAXINE NELSON

Colby Free Press

It's been a busy week for Sacred Heart Catholic School in Colby as students and teachers joined other Catholic schools nationwide in observing Catholic Schools Week, which started last Saturday and concludes Friday. The national theme is *Where Faith & Knowledge Meet*.

"The purpose of Catholic Schools Week is to make the community aware that we have a Catholic school here," said Dave Evert, principal.

"It also presents an option that we can use to not only learn academics but to learn spiritual growth and the religious aspect of our education." Currently, there are 152 children enrolled in the school, in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, and 11 teachers, full and part-time, he said.

Although activities were planned each day this week, today's tribute to volunteers and a talk by Lisa Jones, Thomas County Rodeo

Queen was canceled due to the weather.

The theme for today was *Faith and Knowledge Meet In Our Volunteers*, Evert said.

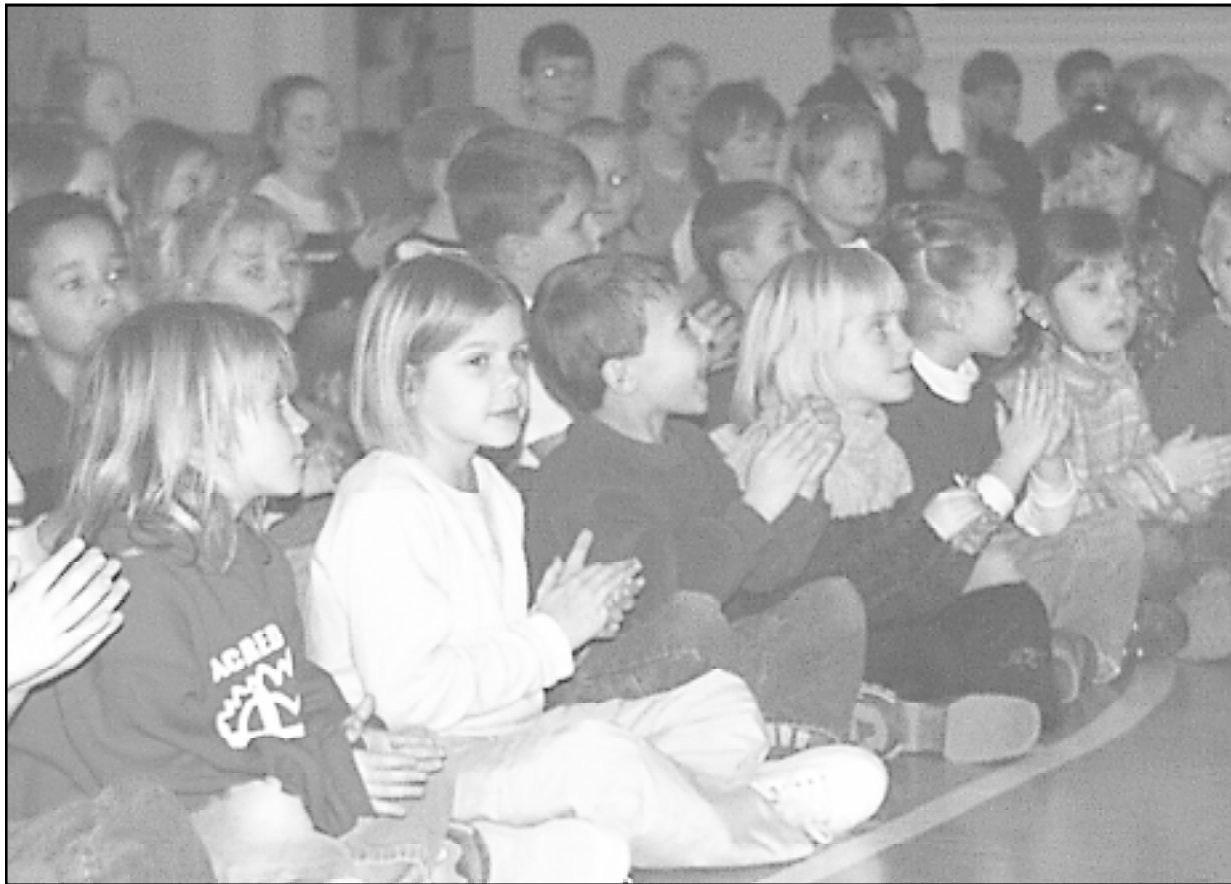
The Red Barn Gang from Rexford entertained Wednesday noon. The theme was *Faith and Knowledge Meet in our Nation*.

Volunteers from the community who help with the school were to join the students for lunch today, but that was canceled due to the weather. The Friday theme is *Faith and Knowledge Meet in our Teachers*.

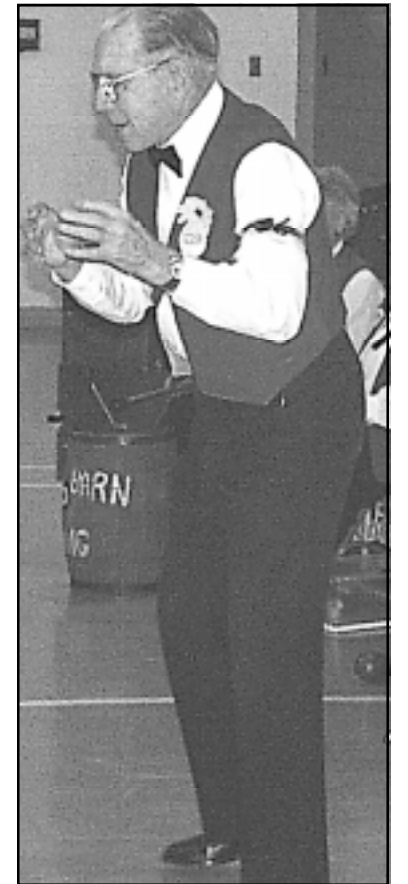
There will also be storytellers — Kansas story tellers — and the Colby Community College drama department, under the direction of Walter Yuhre, will have students read excerpts out of Kansas folklore books in costume in the morning.

The McLemore of Colby family will conduct a sing-along Friday morning.

The children will travel to Oakley for an assembly with the Catholic school there in the afternoon.



Gene Rogers, right, showed off some fancy footwork to students from Colby Sacred Heart School Wednesday. Rogers and the rest of Rexford's



JAY KELLEY/Colby Free Press

Red Barn Gang entertained students after lunch. Activities for today were cancelled due to weather conditions.

## Briefly

### Weather: Warmer days

As the snow moves out, clear skies move in, bringing chilly overnight readings and warmer daytime temperatures for the Colby region, says the National Weather Service. Tonight, clear, lows +7, but down to around zero in wind-protected areas, and northwest winds 10-15 mph. Friday, mostly sunny, highs in the middle 30s and west winds 10-15 mph. Friday night, clear, lows +10-15, but much colder in wind-protected areas. Saturday and Sunday, clear, highs in the 40s and lows around +15. Colby's high Wednesday was 22 and the overnight low this morning was 15. The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averaging 31 degrees.

Colby received 6.2 inches of snow, containing 0.47 inches of moisture up to 8 a.m. today. Total precipitation for the month is now 0.57 inches. The records for Jan. 31: 71 in 1911 and —18 in 1918. The coolest daytime high for the date was +2 in 1985 and the warmest overnight low for the date was 33 in 1925. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

### Museum activity rescheduled

Weather conditions prompted the cancellation of the Prairie Museum of Art and History's box social today, said

Judy Kleinsorge, education director. However, the staff has rescheduled the event for Friday beginning at noon. The program will be the same and include a double feature, *Faces and Places of Northwest Kansas* and *The saga of Wind Wagon Smith*. For questions, call 462-4570.

### Singles to dance Friday

The Colby Singles Group has planned its monthly dance from 8 p.m. to midnight, Friday. Entertainment will be provided by Off Limits, featuring Dick and Maybelle Moore of Colby. For details or questions, call Don Birzer, coordinator, at 462-2127.

### Feed scheduled Saturday

The annual Odd Fellows and Rebekahs pancake and sausage feed will be held Saturday, from 7 a.m.-2 p.m., at the Colby Community Building. Proceeds will be used for Thomas County freshman or sophomore scholarships. Everyone is invited. Admission is \$3 per person.

### Recycling center takes phone books

The Thomas County Recycling Center is taking old telephone books at its collection site, 720 E. College Dr. in Colby. Those wanting to drop off the books should use the magazine bins, coordinators said.

